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Sidebars

Navy Pursuing 'Smaller, Deployable, Interactive' Networked Systems

by Stephen Willingham

With more than $500 million slated for simulation-based training systems during the next eight years, the Navy plans to rely on Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (ID/IQ) contracts to acquire new products and services.

The largest portion of the Navy's simulation plan is worth about $375 million, said Capt. Jay Hixson, former commander of Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division (NAWCTSD), headquartered in Orlando, where he addressed an industry briefing earlier this year.

This piece of the training pie includes both flight simulators and maintenance trainers, "and just about everything else across the board," he said.

Keeping up with the frenetic pace of technology changes during the past decade propelled the Navy and the Marine Corps into ID/IQ-type acquisition practices, Hixson said.

The Marine Corps Simulation Master Plan, worth $300 million, includes simulator operations and maintenance for the entire Marine inventory.

"There used to be a lot of big, mechanical devices, like large, dome simulators," he explained. "But this curve has been broken. The future is smaller, deployable, interactive systems. There will be no more $50 million or $100 million mechanical simulators."

The goal is to bring simulators to Navy and Marine air crews, reversing the old method of transporting crews to the simulator. This way, they can train aboard ships on their way to forward deployment theaters in order to keep their skills sharp, Navy training officials said.

"Information superiority is what is being bought now," said Hixson. And the necessary acquisition tools for obtaining these systems has had to change accordingly, he said. "Better information gives you certain advantages over [simply] larger forces and greater numbers," he said.

In 1997, Hixson reported the Navy had 22 flight simulators on back order. ID/IQ contracts are credited with reducing that number to three for fiscal year 2000, he said.

"ID/IQ contracts have created more efficiency and better technology utilization," by getting simulation trainers into the hands of users sooner, rather than later, said Hixson.